

POEMS

KENNETH
FEARING

P O E M S

by

**KENNETH
FEARING**

**Introduction by
Edward Dahlberg**

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TO RACHEL

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

THE evolution of the author of *Angel Arms* is amazing, and his place in American Literature is not as easy to define as a glance at his book would immediately suggest. So close to America, he is actually more in the tradition of the French Symbolists. There is very much in his life, temperament and talents that recall Tristan Corbière. His fantastic patterns of slang and speech, "reasoned derangement of all the senses," his gargoylish diableries, are those of a Tristan Corbière, torn out of context and place, but a Corbière with Marxian insights.

Angel Arms was a slender but gifted volume of lean ironies, acid portraits of Woolworth shopgirls and New Yorkese cadences of doggerel lives. In his *Poems*, Kenneth Fearing has succeeded in inditing the sleazy cinema dreams, the five and dime loves and frustrations, the mystery pulp heroism and furnished-room microcosm of the pulverized petty bourgeois. And this he has done with a novelist's technic; for besides being poems they are, in effect, short novels, with all the day-to-day thickness of incident, smell, dust, walls of the French nouvelles.

The poems have also the narrative development of the novel: at the beginning, there are close-ups of the bought-magistrates, the disincarnated radio voice, the swivel-chair magnates, heard in private monologue and seen in "unrehearsed acts." The theme unscrolls and the "bargain heroes" stalk across the screen: the Will Hays, the Gene Tunneys, the Al Capones—and "the ectoplasm" of the "profitable smile hovers inescapably everywhere about us."

The poet interweaves comments done with a news reel eye, but with inexorable, Marxist interpretations: "All win-

ter she came there begging for milk. So we had the shacks along the river destroyed by police." "The child was nursed on Government bonds. Cut its teeth on a hand grenade. Grew fat on shrapnel . . . Laughed at the bayonet through its heart." Here is the entire cycle of life and death today; and here are lines from a deeply imagined poem which make a perfect slogan.

Kenneth Fearing's irony is very special, unique in the history of American poetry. Were it not freighted with pity and a gnarled, pulsating tenderness it would be a leer. But here is one of the most perfect examples of satire in literature in its truest light, that is, in its most tragic hue. It is as if Satire had ironically disrobed herself.

His names, symbols, Beatrice Fairfax, Jesse James, Aimee Semple McPherson, selected with uniform intention, are, to make use of the poet's own words, Rialto Equations. Thus, the apostrophe to Beatrice Fairfax becomes clear: she is a reversed dantean Beatrice in a Paramount moving picture *Vita Nuova*. And this is as near to Rimbaud's hell as any mortal would care to approach. Behind these equations, these "reasoned derangements," is satire turned up side down, that is, horror and revulsion. Underneath the "death-ray smile," anguish and torture. The reader must reverse every ironic comment and title to uncover the true intention.

The poet's outlook, which in *Angel Arms* was like an elliptical recollection of the laughing gas of rodents in a dismembered dream, becomes something very positive in the *Poems*. Here the intuitions and picture are an accusation and a foreshadowing of the doom of the whole capitalistic society: "Maggots and darkness will attend the alibi." And as the poems in their chronological progression become more incisive and attain Marxian lucidity the ironic comments rise and expand into an affirmative Communist statement.

We should pause to sample the kind of telling irony in the *Poems*, as in, *What If Mr. Jesse James Should Some Day Die?*

“Where will we ever again find food to eat, clothes to wear, a roof and a bed, now that the Wall Street plunger has gone to his hushed, exclusive, paid-up tomb?

How can we get downtown today, with the traction king stretched flat on his back in the sand at Miami Beach?”

Note the texture of bitterness, and elegiac tenderness, in *Lullaby*, almost entirely wanting in the bohemian poet of *Angel Arms*:

are the trees that line the country estates, tall as the
lynch trees, as straight, as black;
is the moon that lights the mining towns, dim as the light
upon tenement roofs, grey upon the hands at the
bars of Moabit, cold as the bars of the Tombs.

The poem, *Denouement*, has major qualities: “and let the paid-up rent become South Sea music,” a song of the unemployed. Finally, full-throated, the poet looking beyond the horizon toward a socialist civilization, a *Vita Nuova* of the workers, sings out:

Sky be blue, and more than blue; wind, be flesh and blood,
flesh and blood, be deathless;
walls, streets, be home;
desire, of millions, become more real than warmth and
breath and strength and bread;

Kenneth Fearing is a poet for workers; his poems are deeply incarnadined in evictions, strikes, hunger; but his

appeal is not restricted to his class. His poetry, for those who are still wavering, is one more piece of documented evidence of the horrible mutilation of human dreams and nobleness under capitalism. In very truth, such a fecund talent of poetic insight belongs especially to us.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

POEMS

CONCLUSION

You will give praise to all things, praise without end;
idly in the morning, bluntly at noon, cunningly with the
evening cigar, you will meditate further praise;
so will the days pass, each profitable and serene; so
will your sleep be undisturbed; so you will live;
no faith will be difficult, rising from doubt; no love
will be false, born of dread;

In the flaring parks, in the speakeasies, in the hushed acad-
emies, your murmur will applaud the wisdom of a
thousand quacks. For theirs is the kingdom.

By your sedate nod in the quiet office you will grieve
with the magnate as he speaks of sacrifice. For his
is the power.

Your knowing glance will affirm the shrewd virtue of
clown and drudge; directors' room or streetcorner,
the routine killer will know your candid smile; your
handclasp, after the speeches at the club, will en-
dorse the valor of loud suburban heroes. For theirs
is the glory forever and ever.

Always, more than wise, you will be found with the many
resolved against the few;
but you will be a brother, on second thought, to all men.

The metropolitan dive, jammed with your colleagues, the
derelicts; the skyscraper, owned by your twin, the
pimp of gumdrops and philanthropy; the auditor-
iums, packed with weeping creditors, your peers;
the morgues, tenanted by your friends, the free
dead; the asylums, cathedrals, prisons, treasuries,

brothels, shrines—upon all, all of them you will find
means to bestow praise,

And as you know, at last, that all of this will be,
as you walk among millions, indifferent to them,
or stop and read the journals filled with studied alarm,
or pause and hear, with no concern, the statesman vend-
ing manufactured bliss,

You will be grateful for an easy death,
your silence will praise them for killing you.

WINNER TAKE ALL

Innocent of the mean or stupid, and innocent of crime,
still, justice denied you, from this extremity there is no
escape;

say to the accusing eyes, say to the doctor standing at
your deathbed, say to the memory of your mis-
takes, say you are innocent,

Say to the telegram announcing death you are innocent of
death;

say to the ticker that wipes you out this failure was not
to be foreseen,

Tell the black headlines shouting your infamy to millions
that even a judge has to have what he has to have,
and they say you've been bought, fixed, call it a bribe
when you borrow money from a friend;

Yes, tell the neighbors,

after he's gone, calling you a lowdown doublecrossing
whore,

tell them you are innocent,

a woman's got to have what she's got to have, and you
had to have that man,

Say to the world you are a man of worth, aloof from days
filled with brisk refusal and command,

say you are a gentleman, untouched by the pettiness
forced upon you,

say you, also, are a talking-picture queen, innocent of
vacant nights, useless desires, bargain heroes,

Go on, tell the jury you are innocent of murder,
shooting at an arm reaching for a gun to drop you dead,
robbery, yes, but you never meant to kill that crazy
fool, yes, robbery,
and who knows how you needed money?—
you've got to have what you've got to have, you're
going to do what you've got to do,

And you are innocent of what has to happen,
innocent, when they put you out on the street, when they
look at you and laugh, when you grow old and fade
away, when they strap you in the electric chair,
tell them all you are innocent;

What if they don't listen and there is no escape?
Still you are innocent, and brave, and wise, and strong.

RESURRECTION

You will remember the kisses, real or imagined;
you will remember the faces that were before you, and
the words exchanged;
you will remember the minute crowded with meaning,
the moment of pain, the aimless hour;
you will remember the cities, and the plains, and the
mountains, and the sea,

And recall the friendly voice of the killer, or the voice of
the priest, inhumanly sweet;
recall the triumphant smile of the duped;
you will not forget compassion that glittered in the
eyes of the moneylender, refusing you, nor forget
the purpose that lay beneath the merchant's warmth;
you will not forget the voice of the bought magistrate
quivering in horror through the courtroom above
prostitute and pimp,
the majesty of the statesman at the microphone, the
sober majesty of the listening clerk,
the face of the fool, radiant on newspaper and screen;

You will remember hope that crawled up the barroom tap
and spoke through the confident speech of the lost,
happiness clearly displayed on the staring billboards,
love casually revealed in the magazines and novels, or
stated in the trembling limbs of ancient millionaires,
you will remember the triumph easily defined by the
rebel savior, by the breadloaf in the hand of the
ghetto wife, by the inscription on the patriot tomb,
you will remember your laughter that rose with the
steam from the carcass on the street
in hatred and pity exactly matched.

These are the things that will return to you,
to mingle vividly with the days and nights, with the
sound of motors and the sun's warmth,
with fatigue and desire,
as you work, and sleep, and talk, and laugh, and die.

OBITUARY

Take him away, he's as dead as they die.

Hear that ambulance bell, his eyes are staring straight
at death.

Look at the fingers growing stiff, touch the face al-
ready cold, see the stars in the sky, look at the
stains on the street,

Look at the ten-ton truck that came rolling along fast and
stretched him out cold,

Then turn out his pockets and make the crowd move on.

Sergeant, what was his name? What's the driver's
name? What's your name, sergeant?

Go through his clothes,

take out the cigars, the money, the papers, the keys,
take everything there is,

And give the dollar and a half to the Standard Oil. It was
his true-blue friend.

Give the key of his flat to the D.A.R. They were friends
of his, the best a man ever had.

Take out the pawnticket, wrap it, seal it, send it along
to the People's Gas. They were life-long pals. It
was more than his brother. They were just like
twins.

Give away the shoes,

give his derby away. Donate his socks to the Guggen-
heim fund,

let the Morgans hold the priceless bills, and leaflets,
and racing tips under lock and key,

and give Mr. Hoover the pint of gin.
Because they're all good men. And they were friends
of his.

Don't forget Gene Tunney. Don't forget Will Hays. Don't
forget Al Capone. Don't forget the I.R.T.
Give them his matches to remember him by.
They lived with him, in the same old world. And they're
good men, too.

That's all, sergeant. There's nothing else, lieutenant.
There's no more, captain.
Pick up the body, feed it, shave it, find it another job.

Have a cigar, driver?
Take two cigars.
You were his true-blue pal.

AMERICAN RHAPSODY (I)

Let us present,
this night of love, and murder, and reckoning, and
sleep,
evening of illusion, night filled with thousands intent
upon ordained ends,
let us introduce, among a few leading citizens in un-
rehearsed acts,

That popular ghost, Franklin Devoe, serial hero of the cur-
rent magazines,
the exact, composite dream of those who read.
An artist in innocence,
tonight the ectoplasm of Mr. Devoe hovers inescap-
ably everywhere about us,
that profitable smile invisible above the skyscrapers,
those serene eyes piercing nightcourts, clinics, tene-
ments, that exclusive nicety available in remote vil-
lages and farms,

That breadline.

Salvation before coffee and rolls.

"Last night a number of you gentlemen hurried through
the banquet and dashed around to the mission next
door for another slice of bread.

Is that gratitude? Is that decency? Certified scabies?
Starvation preferred?"

That genius, that literateur, Theodore True,

St. Louis boy who made good as an Englishman in
theory, a deacon in vaudeville, a cipher in politics,
undesirable in large numbers to any community.

Closing prices: Is This Really a Commercial Age?—
100. That Anguished Soul of Marcel Proust—150.
Liberty or Dangerous Freedom, Which?—210.
That Unknown, Patriotic, Law-abiding Corpse—
305.

We present that talking-picture queen, and the superfilm:
“Will the daughter of the humble whorehouse mag-
nate wed the patrician wardheeler, O America?”
And the Blumberg twins (magistrate Ike, gorilla Mike)
in conference with that blond, blond evangelist.
The senator at that microphone. Those spinster sybils
in the rotogravure. That proprietor of the revolu-
tion, oracle Steve.

“I killed her because she had an evil eye.” “We are not
thinking now of our own profits, of course.” “Noth-
ing can take back from us this night.” “Let me
alone you God damn rat.” “Two rickies.” “Cash.”

These are merely close-ups.

At a distance these eyes and faces and arms,
maimed in the expiation of living, scarred in payment
exacted through knife, hunger, silence, hope, ex-
haustion, regret,
melt into an ordered design, strange and significant,
and not without peace.

DIVIDENDS

This advantage to be seized; and here, an escape prepared against an evil day;
so it is arranged, consummately, to meet the issues.
Convenience and order. Necessary murder and divorce. A decent repute.

Such are the plans, in clear detail.

She thought it was too soon but they said no, it was too late. They didn't trust the other people.

Sell now.

He was a fool to ignore the market. It could be explained, he said. With the woman, and after the theatre she made a scene. None of them felt the crash for a long time.

What is swifter than time?

So it is resolved, upon awakening. This way it is devised, preparing for sleep. So it is revealed, uneasily, in strange dreams.

A defense against grey, hungry, envious millions. A veiled watch to be kept upon this friend.

Dread that handclasp. Seek this. Smile.

They didn't trust the others. They were wary. It looked suspicious. They preferred to wait, they said.

Gentlemen, here is a statement for the third month, and here, Mildred, is the easiest way.

Such is the evidence, convertible to profit. These are the dividends, waiting to be used.

Here are the demands again, considered again, and again the endless issues are all secure.

Such are the facts. Such are the details. Such are the proofs.

Almighty God, these are the plans,
these are the plans until the last moment of the last
hour of the last day,
and then the end. By error or accident.
Burke of cancer. Jackson out at the secret meeting of
the board. Hendricks through the window of the
nineteenth floor.
Maggots and darkness will attend the alibi.
Peace on earth. And the finer things.
So it is all devised.
Thomas, the car.

X MINUS X

Even when your friend, the radio, is still; even when her
dream, the magazine, is finished; even when his life,
the ticker, is silent; even when their destiny, the
boulevard, is bare,
and after that paradise, the dancehall, is closed; after
that theatre, the clinic, is dark,

Still there will be your desire, and her desire, and his
desire, and their desire,
your laughter, their laughter,
your curse and his curse, her reward and their reward,
their dismay and his dismay and her dismay and
yours—

Even when your enemy, the collector, is dead; even when
your counsellor, the salesman, is sleeping; even
when your sweetheart, the movie queen, has spoken;
even when your friend, the magnate, is gone.

1933

You heard the gentleman, with automatic precision, speak
the truth.

Cheers. Triumph.

And then mechanically it followed the gentleman lied.
Deafening applause. Flashlights, cameras, microphones.
Floral tribute. Cheers.

Down Mrs. Hogan's alley, your hand with others reaching
among the ashes, cinders, scrapiron, garbage, you
found the rib of sirloin wrapped in papal docu-
ments. Snatched it. Yours by right, the title clear.
Looked up. Saw lips twitch in the smiling head thrust
from the museum window. "A new deal."

And ran. Escaped. You returned the million dollars. You
restored the lady's virginity.

You were decorated 46 times in rapid succession by
the King of Italy. Took a Nobel prize. Evicted
again, you went downtown, slept at the movies,
stood in the breadline, voted yourself a limousine.

Rage seized the Jewish Veterans of Foreign Wars. In
footnotes, capitals, Latin, italics, the poet of the
Sunday supplements voiced steamheated grief. The
RFC expressed surprise.

And the news, at the Fuller Brush hour, leaked out.
Shouts. Cheers. Stamping of feet. Blizzard of con-
fetti. Thunderous applause.

But the stocks were stolen. The pearls of the actress, stolen
again. The bonds embezzled.

Inexorably, the thief pursued. Captured inexorably.
Tried. Inexorably acquitted.

And again you heard the gentleman, with automatic precision, speak the truth.

Saw, once more, the lady's virginity restored.

In the sewers of Berlin, the directors prepared, the room dark for the seance, she a simple Baroness, you a lowly millionaire, came face to face with John D. Christ.

Shook hands, his knife at your back, your knife at his.
Sat down.

Saw issue from his throat the ectoplasm of Pius VIII, and heard "A test of the people's faith." You said amen, voted to endorse but warned against default, you observed the astral form of Nicholas II, and heard "Sacred union of all." Saw little "Safe for democracy" Nell. Listened to Adolph "Safety of France and society" Thiers.

And beheld the faith, the union of rags, blackened hands, stacked carrion, breached barricades in flame, no default, credit restored, Union Carbide 94 3/8, call money 10%, disarm, steel five points up, rails rise, Dupont up, disarm, disarm, and heard again, ghost out of ghost out of ghost out of ghost, the voice of the senator reverberate through all the morgues of all the world, echo again for liberty in the catacombs of Rome, again sound through the sweatshops, ghettos, factories, mines, hunger again repealed, circle the London cenotaph once more annulling death, saw ten million dead returned to life, shot down again, again restored,

Heard once more the gentleman speak, with automatic precision, the final truth,
once more beheld the lady's virginity, the lady's decency, the lady's purity, the lady's innocence, paid for, certified, and restored.

Crawled amorously into bed. Felt among the maggots for
the mouldering lips. The crumbled arms. Found
them.

Tumult of cheers. Music and prayer by the YMCA.
Horns, rockets. Spotlight.

The child was nursed on government bonds. Cut its
teeth on a hand grenade. Grew fat on shrapnel.
Bullets. Barbed wire. Chlorine gas. Laughed at
the bayonet through its heart.

These are the things you saw and heard, these are the
things you did, this is your record,
you.

DEAR BEATRICE FAIRFAX:

**Is it true that Father Coughlin and Miss Aimee
Semple McPherson and General Hugh
Johnson and Mrs. Barbara Mdivani
and Mr. Samuel Insull and Miss
Greta Garbo and Mr. Prince
Mike Romanoff?**

Foolproof baby with that memorized smile,
burglarproof baby, fireproof baby with that rehearsed
appeal,
reconditioned, standardized, synchronized, amplified,
best-by-test baby with those push-the-button tears,

Your bigtime sweetheart worships you and you alone,
your goodtime friend lives for you, only you,
he loves you, trusts you, needs you, respects you, gives
for you, fascinated, mad about you,
all wrapped up in you like the accountant in the trust,
like the banker trusts the judge, like the judge
respects protection, like the gunman needs his
needle, like the trust must give and give—

He's with you all the way from the top of the bottle to the
final alibi,
from the handshake to the hearse, from the hearse to
the casket,
to the handles on the casket, to the nails, to the hinges,
to the satin, to the flowers, to the music, to the
prayer, to the graveyard, to the tomb,

But just the same, baby, and never forget,
it takes a neat, smart, fast, good, sweet doublecross
to doublecross the gentleman who doublecrossed the
gentleman who doublecrossed
your doublecrossing, doublecrossing, doublecross friend.

AMERICAN RHAPSODY (2)

She said did you get it, and he said did you get it,
at the clinic, at the pawnshop, on the breadline, in jail,
shoes and a roof and the rent and a cigarette and bread
and a shirt and coffee and sleep—

Reaching at night for a bucket of coal among the B & O
flats in the B & O yards,
they said there's another one, get him they said,
or staring again at locked and guarded factory gates;
or crouched in a burglarproof loft, hand around a
gun; or polite, urgent, face before a face behind a
steelbarred cage:

All winter she came there, begging for milk. So we had
the shacks along the river destroyed by police. But
at the uptown exhibit a rich, vital sympathy infused
the classic mood. When muriatic acid in the whiskey
failed, and running him down with an auto failed,
and ground glass failed, we finished the job by
shoving a gastube down his throat.

Next year, however, we might have something definite,

Mountains or plains, crossroads, suburbs, cities or the sea,
did you take it, was it safe, did you buy it, did you beg
it, did you steal it, was it known,

Name, address, relatives, religion, income, sex, bank
account, insurance, health, race, experience, age,
out beyond the lunatic asylum, on the city dump; on
the junkheap past the bank, past the church, past
the jungle, past the morgue,

where rats eat the crusts and worms eat the satins and
maggots eat the mould
and fire eats the headlines, eats the statements and the
pictures, eats the promises and proofs, eats the rind
of an orange and a rib and a claw and a skull and
an eye,

Did you find it, was it there, did they see you, were they
waiting, did they shoot, did they stab, did they
burn, did they kill—

one on the gallows and one on the picketline and one
in the river and one on the ward and another one
slugged and another one starved and another insane
and another by the torch.

SUNDAY TO SUNDAY

Unknown to Mabel, who works as cook for the rich and
snobbish Aldergates,
the insured, by subway suicide, provides for a widow
and three sons;
picked from the tracks, scraped from the wheels,
identified, this happy ending restores the nation to
contact with its heritage: A Hearst cartoon.

Meanwhile it is Infant Welfare Week, milk prices up,
child clinics closed, relief curtailed,
the Atlantic and Pacific fleets in full support off Vera
Cruz,
in court, sentence suspended, Rose Raphael dispossessed
of a Flatbush packingbox,
Jim Aldergate in love with Mabel, but unaware she has
been married to Zorrocco the gangster,

An envoy bearing again an after-luncheon wreath to the
tomb of the patriot dead,
stocks firmer, meanwhile, on rumors of drought and
war,
and Zorrocco, not knowing Mabel loves Jim, has
returned to use her for his criminal schemes; but in
a motor crash he is killed, Mabel winning at last to
happiness in Jim's arms,
as hundreds, thousands, millions search the want ads,
search the factories, search the subways, search
the streets, search to sleep in missions, jungles,
depots, parks, sleep to wake again to gutters,
scrapheaps, breadlines, jails,

Unknown to the beautiful, beautiful, beautiful Mabel;
unknown to the deathray smile of president or
priest; unknown to Zorrocco, Jim, or the unknown
soldier; unknown to WGN and the bronze, bronze
bells of Sunday noon.

AS THE FUSE BURNS DOWN

What will you do, when the phone rings, and they say to you: What will you do?

What will you say, when the sun lights all the avenue again, and the battle monument still reads: These dead did not die in vain?

When night returns, when the clock strikes one, the clock strikes two, three, four, when the city sleeps, awakes, when day returns, what will you say, feel, believe, do,

Do with the culture found in a tabloid, what can be done with a Lydia Pinkham ad?

What reply can you give to the pawnclerk's decent bid for your silverware?

How are you to be grateful as "Thrift" glares out across the ghetto night; reassured, as the legless, sightless one extends his cup; who can be surprised, why, how, as the statesman speaks for peace and moves for war?

Then, when they tell you the executioner does the best that he can, what can you say? What then?

Or they come to you, as human fingers comb the city's refuse, and say, look, you have been saved; when they tell you, see, you were right, and it is the day the utilities evidence has been destroyed; as the state is saved again, three dead, six shot, and they tell you, look, you have survived, the reward is yours, you have won—what then? What then?

What will you say and where will you turn?

What will you do? What will you do? What will
you do?

NO CREDIT

Whether dinner was pleasant, with the windows lit by
gunfire, and no one disagreed; or whether, later,
we argued in the park, and there was a touch of
vomit-gas in the evening air;

Whether we found a greater, deeper, more perfect love,
by courtesy of Camels, over NBC; whether the
comics amused us, or the newspapers carried a
hunger death, and published a whitehouse prayer
for mother's day;

whether the bills were paid or not, whether or not we
had our doubts, whether we spoke our minds at
Joe's, and the receipt said "Not Redeemable," and
the cash register rang up "No Sale,"

whether the truth was then, or later, or whether the
best had already gone—

Nevertheless, we know; as every turn is measured; as
every unavoidable risk is known;

as nevertheless, the flesh grows old, dies, dies in its only
life, is gone;

the reflection goes from the mirror; as the shadow, of
even a Communist, is gone from the wall;

as nevertheless, the current is thrown and the wheels
revolve; and nevertheless, as the word is spoken
and the wheat grows tall and the ships sail on—

None but the fool is paid in full; none but the broker, none
but the scab is certain of profit;

the sheriff alone may attend a third degree in formal
attire; alone, the academy artists multiply in dignity
as a trooper's bayonet guards the door;

only Steve, the side-show robot, knows content; only Steve, the mechanical man in love with a photo-electric beam, remains aloof; only Steve, who sits and smokes or stands in salute, is secure;

Steve, whose shoebutton eyes are blind to terror, whose painted ears are deaf to appeal, whose welded breast will never be slashed by bullets, whose armature soul can hold no fear.

DIRGE

1-2-3 was the number he played but today the number came
3-2-1;
bought his Carbide at 30 and it went to 29; had the
favorite at Bowie but the track was slow—

O, executive type, would you like to drive a floating power,
knee-action, silk-upholstered six? Wed a Hollywood
star? Shoot the course in 58? Draw to the ace,
king, jack?

O, fellow with a will who won't take no, watch out for
three cigarettes on the same, single match; O,
democratic voter born in August under Mars,
beware of liquidated rails—

Denouement to denouement, he took a personal pride in the
certain, certain way he lived his own, private life,
but nevertheless, they shut off his gas; nevertheless, the
bank foreclosed; nevertheless, the landlord called;
nevertheless, the radio broke,

And twelve o'clock arrived just once too often,
just the same he wore one grey tweed suit, bought one
straw hat, drank one straight Scotch, walked one
short step, took one long look, drew one deep
breath,
just one too many,

And wow he died as wow he lived,
going whop to the office and blooie home to sleep and
biff got married and bam had children and oof got
fired,
zowie did he live and zowie did he die,

With who the hell are you at the corner of his casket, and
where the hell we going on the right-hand silver
knob, and who the hell cares walking second from
the end with an American Beauty wreath from why
the hell not,

Very much missed by the circulation staff of the New York
Evening Post; deeply, deeply mourned by the
B.M.T.,

Wham, Mr. Roosevelt; pow, Sears Roebuck; awk, big
dipper; bop, summer rain;
bong, Mr., bong, Mr., bong, Mr., bong.

WHAT IF MR. JESSE JAMES SHOULD SOME DAY DIE?

Where will we ever again find food to eat, clothes to wear,
a roof and a bed, now that the Wall street plunger
has gone to his hushed, exclusive, paid-up tomb?

How can we get downtown today, with the traction
king stretched flat on his back in the sand at Miami
Beach?

And now that the mayor has denounced the bankers,
now that the D. A. denies all charges of graft, now
that the clergy have spoken in defense of the home,

O, dauntless khaki soldier, O, steadfast pauper, O, ex-
perienced vagrant, O, picturesque mechanic, O,
happy hired man,

O, still unopened skeleton, O, tall and handsome target,
O, neat, thrifty, strong, ambitious, brave prospective
ghost,

Is there anything left for the people to do, is there any-
thing at all that remains unsaid?

But who shot down the man in the blue overalls? Who
stopped the milk? Who took the mattress, the table,
the birdcage, and piled them in the street? Who
drove teargas in the picket's face? Who burned
the crops? Who killed the herd? Who leveled the
walls of the packingbox city? Who held the torch
to the Negro pyre? Who stuffed the windows and
turned on the gas for the family of three?

No more breadlines. No more blackjacks. No more Roose-
velts. No more Hearsts.

No more vag tanks, Winchells, True Stories, deputy sheriffs, no more scabs.

No more trueblue, patriotic, doublecross leagues. No more Ku Klux Klan. No more heart-to heart shake-downs. No more D.A.R.

No more gentlemen of the old guard commissioned to safeguard, as chief commanding blackguard in the rearguard of the home guard, the 1 inch, 3 inch, 6 inch, 10 inch, 12 inch,
no more 14, 16, 18 inch shells.

ESCAPE

Acid for the whorls of the fingertips; for the face, a
surgeon's knife; oblivion to the name;
eyes, hands, color of hair, condition of teeth, habits,
haunts, the subject's health;
wanted or not, guilty or not guilty, dead or alive, did
you see this man

Walk in a certain distinctive way through the public streets
or the best hotels,
turn and go,
escape from marshals, sheriffs, collectors, thugs; from
the landlord's voice or a shake of the head; leave
an afternoon beer; go from an evening cigar in a
wellknown scene,
walk, run, slip from the earth into less than air?

Gone from the teletype, five-feet ten; lost from the
headlines, middle-aged, grey, posed as a gentleman;
a drawling voice in a blue serge suit, fled from the radio,
forehead scarred,

Tear up the letters and bury the clothes, throw away the
keys, file the number from the gun, burn the record
of birth, smash the name from the tomb, bathe the
fingers in acid, wrap the bones in lime,
forget the street, the house, the name, the day,

But something must be saved from the rise and fall of the
copper's club; something must be kept from the
auctioneer's hammer; something must be guarded
from the rats and the fire on the city dump;

something, for warmth through the long night of death;
something to be saved from the last parade
through granite halls and go, go free, arise with
the voice that pleads not guilty,
go with the verdict that ascends forever beyond steel-
barred windows into blue, deep space,

Guilty of vagrancy, larceny, sedition, assault,
tried, convicted, sentenced, paroled, imprisoned, re-
leased, hunted, seized,
under what name and last seen where? And in what
disguise did the soiled, fingerprinted, bruised,
secondhand, worndown, scarred, familiar disguise
escape?

No name, any name, nowhere, nothing, no one, none.

\$2.50

But that dashing, dauntless, delphic, diehard, diabolic
cracker likes his fiction turned with a certain elegance
and wit; and that anti-anti-anti slum-congestion
clublady prefers romance;
search through the mothballs, comb the lavender and
lace,
were her desires and struggles futile or did an innate
fineness bring him at last to a prouder, richer peace
in a world gone somehow mad?

We want one more compelling novel, Mr. Filbert Sopkins
Jones,
all about it, all about it,
with signed testimonials to its stark, human, while-u-
wait, iced-or-heated, taste-that-sunshine tenderness
and truth;
one more comedy of manners, Sir Warwick Aldous
Wells, involving three blond souls; tried in the
crucible of war, Countess Olga out-of-limbo by
Hearst through the steerage peerage,
glamorous, gripping, moving, try it, send for a 5 cent,
10 cent sample, restores faith to the flophouse,
workhouse, warehouse, whorehouse, bughouse life
of man,
just one more long poem that sings a more heroic age,
baby Edwin, 58,

But the faith is all gone,
and all the courage is gone, used up, devoured on the
first morning of a home relief menu,
you'll have to borrow it from the picket killed last
Tuesday on the fancy knitgoods line;

and the glamor, the ice for the cocktails, the shy appeal,
the favors for the subdeb ball? O.K.,
O.K.,
but they smell of exports to the cannibals,
reek of something blown away from the muzzle of a
twenty inch gun;

Lady, the demand is for a dream that lives and grows and
does not fade when the midnight theater special
pulls out on track 15;
cracker, the demand is for a dream that stands and
quickens and does not crumble when a General
Motors dividend is passed;
lady, the demand is for a dream that lives and grows
and does not die when the national guardsmen fix
those cold, bright bayonets;
cracker, the demand is for a dream that stays, grows
real, withstands the benign, afternoon vision of the
clublady, survives the cracker's evening fantasy of
honor, and profit, and grace.

AMERICAN RHAPSODY (3)

Before warmth and sight and sound are gone,
and sometime the evening lights spring up, as always,
but not for you and not for me,
before the sky is lost, before the clouds are lost, before
their slow, still shadows are lost from the hills,

Shall we meet at 8 o'clock and kiss and exclaim and arrange
another meeting as though there were love,
pretend, even alone, we believe the things we say,
laugh along the boulevard as though there could be
laughter,
make our plans and nourish hope, pretending, what is
the truth, that we ourselves are fooled?

You can be a princess and I'll be the beggar; no, you can
be the beggar, and I'll be king;
you be the mother and go out and beg for food; I'll
be a merchant, the man you approach, a devoted
husband, famous as a host; the merchant can be a
jobless clerk who sleeps on subway platforms then
lies dead in Potter's field; the clerk can be a priest,
human, kindly, one who enjoys a joke; the priest
can be a lady in jail for prostitution and the lady
can be a banker who has his troubles, too;
let the merchant be grieved, let the priest be stirred, let
the banker be moved, let the red squad copper be a
patron of the arts;
you be a rat; I'll be the trap; or we both can be maggots
in the long black box;
murder can be comic and hunger can be kind.

LULLABY

Wide as this night, old as this night is old and young as
it is young, still as this, strange as this,
filled as this night is filled with the light of a moon as
grey;
dark as these trees, heavy as this scented air from the
fields, warm as this hand,
as warm, as strong,

Is the night that wraps all the huts of the south and folds
the empty barns of the west;
is the wind that fans the roadside fire;
are the trees that line the country estates, tall as the
lynch trees, as straight, as black;
is the moon that lights the mining towns, dim as the
light upon tenement roofs, grey upon the hands at
the bars of Moabit, cold as the bars of the Tombs.

20th CENTURY BLUES

What do you call it, bobsled champion, and you, too,
Olympic roller-coaster ace,
high-diving queen, what is the word,
number one man on the Saturday poker squad, motion
picture star incognito as a home girl, life of the
party or you, the serious type, what is it, what is it,

When it's just like a fever shooting up and up and up but
there are no chills and there is no fever,
just exactly like a song, like a knockout, like a dream,
like a book,

What is the word, when you know that all the lights of all
the cities of all the world are burning bright as day,
and you know that some time they all go out for
you,

or your taxi rolls and rolls through streets made of
velvet, what is the feeling, what is the feeling, when
the radio never ends, but the hour, the swift, the
electric, the invisible hour does not stop and does
not turn,

what does it mean, when the get-away money burns in
dollars big as moons, but where is there to go that's
just exactly right,

what have you won, plunger, when the 20 to 1 comes
in, what have you won, salesman, when the dotted
line is signed, True Confession lover, when her
eyelids flutter shut at last, what have you really,
really won,

and what is gone, soldier, soldier, step-and-a-half
marine who saw the whole world, hot-tip addict,

what is always just missed, picker of crumbs, how
much has been lost, denied, what are all the things
destroyed,

Question mark, question mark, question mark, question
mark,

and you, fantasy Frank, and dreamworld Dora, and
hallucination Harold, and delusion Dick, and
nightmare Ned,

What is it, how do you say it, what does it mean, what's the
word,

that miracle thing, the thing that can't be so, quote,
unquote, but just the same it's true,

that third-rail, million-volt exclamation mark, that ditto,
ditto, ditto,

that stop, stop, go.

DENOUMENT

DENOUMENT

I

Sky, be blue, and more than blue; wind, be flesh and blood;
flesh and blood, be deathless;
walls, streets, be home;
desire of millions, become more real than warmth and
breath and strength and bread;
clock, point to the decisive hour and, hour without name
when stacked and waiting murder fades, dissolves,
stay forever as the world grows new;

Truth, be known, be kept forever, let the letters, letters,
souvenirs, documents, snapshots, bills be found at
last, be torn away from a world of lies, be kept as
final evidence, transformed forever into more than
truth;
change, change, rows and rows and rows of figures,
spindles, furrows, desks, change into paid-up rent
and let the paid-up rent become South Sea music;
magic film, unwind, unroll, unfold in silver on that
million mile screen, take us all, bear us again to the
perfect denouement,

Where everything lost, needed, each forgotten thing, all
that never happens,
gathers at last into a dynamite triumph, a rainbow
peace, a thunderbolt kiss,
for you, the invincible, and I, grown older, and he, the
shipping clerk, and she, an underweight blond
journeying home in the last express.

But here is the body found lying face down in a burlap sack, strangled in the noose jerked shut by these trussed and twisted and frantic arms;
 but here are the agents come to seize the bed;
 but here is the vase holding saved-up cigarstore coupons, and here is a way to save on cigars and to go without meat;
 but here is the voice that strikes around the world, "My friends . . . my friends," issues from the radio and thunders "My friends" in newsreel close-ups, explodes across headlines, "Both rich and poor, my friends, must sacrifice," re-echoes, murmuring, through hospitals, deathcells, "My friends . . . my friends . . . my friends . . . my friends . . ."

And who, my friend, are you?

Are you the one who leaped to the blinds of the cannonball express? Or are you the one who started life again with three dependents and a pack of cigarettes?

But how can these things be made finally clear in a post-mortem room with the lips taped shut and the blue eyes cold, wide, still, blind, fixed beyond the steady glare of electric lights, through the white-washed ceiling and the crossmounted roof, past the drifting clouds?

Objection, over-ruled, exception, proceed:

Was yours the voice heard singing one night in a flyblown, sootbeamed, lost and forgotten Santa Fe saloon? Later bellowing in rage? And you boiled up a shirt in a Newark furnished room? Then you found

another job, and pledged not to organize or go on strike?

We offer this union book in evidence. We offer these rent receipts in evidence. We offer in evidence this vacation card marked, "This is the life. Regards to all."

You, lodge member, protestant, crossborn male, the placenta discolored, at birth, by syphilis, you, embryo four inches deep in the seventh month, among so many, many sparks struck and darkened at conception, which were you, you, six feet tall on the day of death?

Then you were at no time the senator's son? Then you were never the beef king's daughter, married in a storm of perfume and music and laughter and rice? And you are not now the clubman who waves and nods and vanishes to Rio in a special plane?

But these are your lungs, scarred and consumed? These are your bones, still marked by rickets? These are your pliers? These are your fingers, O master mechanic, and these are your cold, wide, still, blind eyes?

The witness is lying, lying, an enemy, my friends, of Union Gas and the home:

But how will you know us, wheeled from the icebox and stretched upon the table with the belly slit wide and the entrails removed, voiceless as the clippers bite through ligaments and flesh and nerves and bones,

but how will you know us, attentive, strained, before
the director's desk, or crowded in line in front of
factory gates,
but how will you know us through ringed machinegun
sights as we run and fall in gasmask, steel helmet,
flame-tunic, uniform, bayonet, pack,
but how will you know us, crumbled into ashes, lost in
air and water and fire and stone,
how will you know us, now or any time, who will ever
know that we have lived or died?

And this is the truth? So help you God, this is the truth?
The truth in full, so help you God? So help you
God?

But the pride that was made of iron and could not be
broken, what has become of it, what has become
of the faith that nothing could destroy, what has
become of the deathless hope,
you, whose ways were yours alone, you, the one like no
one else, what have you done with the hour you
swore to remember, where is the hour, the day, the
achievement that would never die?

Morphine. Veronal. Veronal. Morphine. Morphine.
Morphine. Morphine.

3

Leaflets, scraps, dust, match-stubs strew the linoleum that
leads upstairs to the union hall, the walls of the
basement workers' club are dim and cracked and
above the speaker's stand Vanzetti's face shows
green, behind closed doors the committeeroom is
a fog of smoke,

Who are these people?

All day the committee fought like cats and dogs and
twelve of Mr. Kelly's strongarm men patrolled the
aisles that night, them blackjack guys get ten to
twenty bucks a throw, the funds were looted, sent
to Chicago, at the meeting the section comrade
talked like a fool, more scabs came through in trucks
guarded by police,

workers of the world, workers of the world, workers
of the world,

Who are these people and what do they want, can't they be
decent, can't they at least be calm and polite,
besides the time is not yet ripe, it might take years, like
Mr. Kelly said, years,

Decades black with famine and red with war, centuries on
fire, ripped wide,

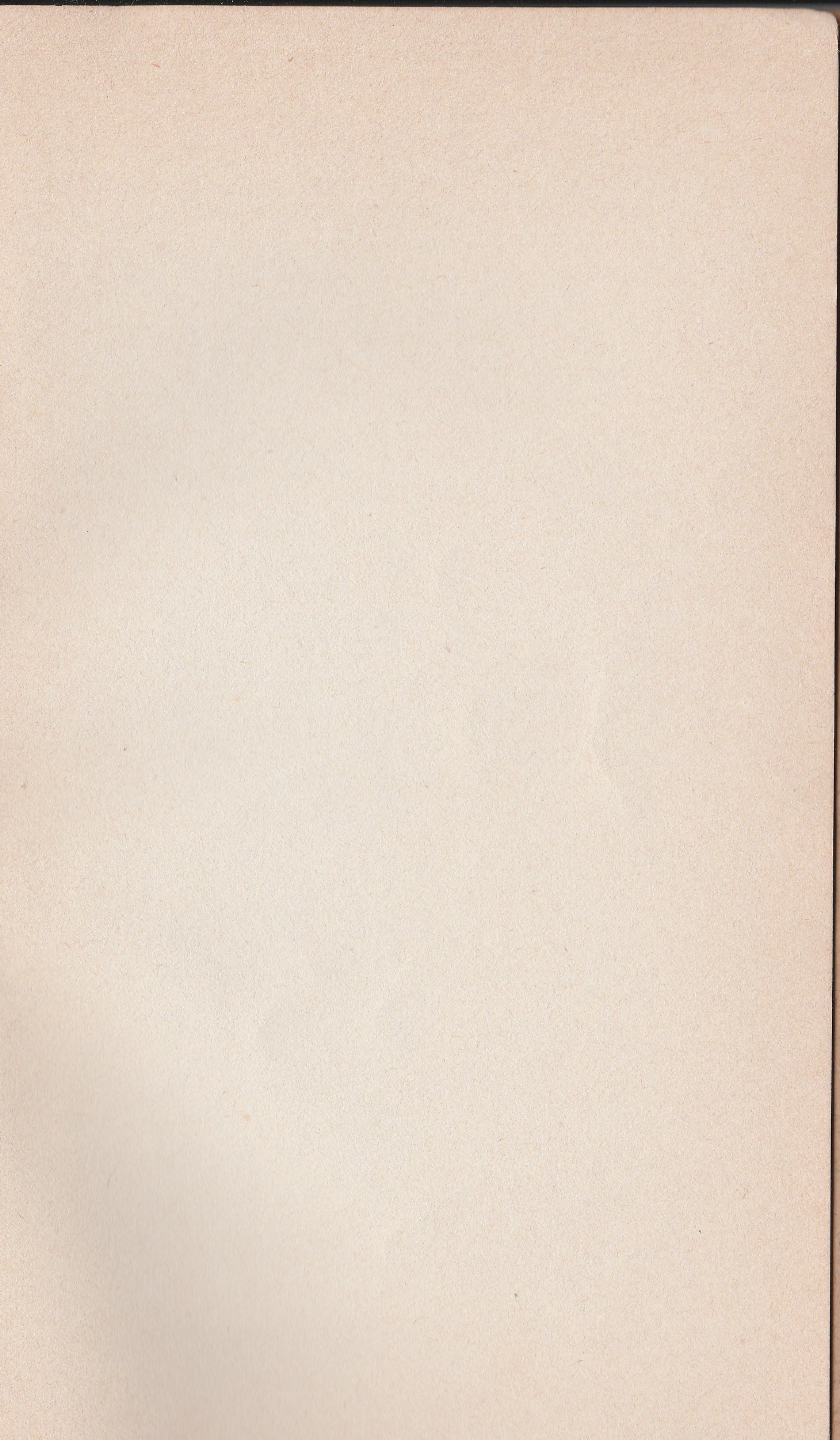
Who are these people and what do they want, why do they
walk back and forth with signs that say "Bread Not
Bullets," what do they mean "They Shall Not Die"
as they sink in clouds of poison gas and fall beneath
clubs, hooves, rifles, fall and do not arise, arise,
unite,

never again these faces, arms, eyes, lips,

Not unless we live, and live again,
return, everywhere alive in the issue that returns, clear
as light that still descends from a star long cold,
again alive and everywhere visible through and
through the scene that comes again, as light on
moving water breaks and returns, heard only in the
words, as millions of voices become one voice, seen
only in millions of hands that move as one,

Look at them gathered, raised, look at their faces, clothes,
who are these people, who are these people,
what hand scrawled large in the empty prison cell "I
have just received my sentence of death. Red
Front," whose voice screamed out in the silence
"Arise"?

And all along the waterfront, there, where rats gnaw into
the leading platforms, here, where the wind whips
at warehouse corners, look, there, here,
everywhere huge across the walls and gates "Your
party lives,"
where there is no life, no breath, no sound, no touch,
no warmth, no light but the lamp that shines on a
trooper's drawn and ready bayonet.





"Approaching genius in his ability
Selden

"It catches the tempo of American

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